

# TAR HEEL TRACE

The Tar Heel Trace byway winds through North Carolina's Coastal Plain from Wilson to Williamston and takes its name from the pine tar industry that once thrived in this portion of the state. "Tar Heel" is the nickname given to the state's residents by British Lt. Gen. Lord William Cornwallis' troops after they emerged from the nearby Tar River with tar stuck to their boots. Another story says the ground alongside many of the state's river fronts was covered with tar that spilled from rafts bringing the product to market.

Pine trees are found in great quantities across North Carolina, particularly in the coastal plain. Early residents found that it was simple to cut these trees and pile the light or fat wood into piles and cover them with soil after setting them on fire. The piles, called tar kilns, were then left to smolder causing the pine resin to run out as a dark tar. Tar was used extensively in the shipping industry. The tar was distilled into turpentine and was used to waterproof rope and wood in the form of either pitch or tar.

**The byway's western terminus is the U.S. 301/N.C. 42 interchange east of Wilson** in Wilson County. **From here, travel east along N.C. 42.** Wilson was formed in 1849 when the towns of

Hickory Grove and Toisnot Depot merged in 1849 as a result of the construction of a new rail line. The new town was

named for Louis D. Wilson, a state senator and early advocate of the public school movement. Wilson was killed during the Mexican War of 1846–48.

The byway begins in the midst



N.C. Department of Agriculture

Soybean fields are common along this byway

of the Toisnot Swamp, some of which has been filled for development. **Travel nine miles from the byway's beginning to the Wilson/Edgecombe County line.** Pass through the communities of Wilbanks and Bridgesville, both of which were established at the turn of the century. **Shortly after crossing the county line, turn right onto N.C. 124.**

**Follow N.C. 124 for 3.5 miles to the town of Macclesfield.** Incorporated in 1901, Macclesfield was named for the town in England from which the ancestors of the town's founder had come. **Leaving town,** cross Bynum Mill Creek and **continue east for 5.5 miles crossing U.S. 258 before reaching the intersection of N.C. 124 and N.C. 42.**

**Turn right onto N.C. 42 and follow two miles to Old Sparta,** established in 1830 and incorporated in 1876. **Cross the Tar River immediately after passing through Old Sparta.** Legend has it that